



Congressional Prayer Caucus

Congressman J. Randy Forbes, Chairman

www.house.gov/forbes/prayercaucus.htm

The Stripping of Purpose

By: Congressman Randy Forbes

Day by day, the spiritual foundations of America are being pushed out of our lives. The words “Under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance have come under fire. In some schools, studying the founding fathers is considered too controversial - perhaps because it is difficult to look at the writings of our founding fathers and not hear their faith. All around the nation a battle is being waged to change the fundamental equation of marriage as a man and a woman. And in courts across the country there are bare walls where the Ten Commandments once hung. America is sliding down the slippery slope of moral relativism.

If you can't feel the slippery slope, you may already be at the bottom of the cliff. And at the bottom, there is no prayer, there is no acknowledgment of our creator, and there is no recognition of our nation's spiritual heritage and its connection to American strength. That is where our nation may be headed.

From time to time, I have heard the President of the United States say how much strength he receives from the knowledge that people across the country kneel in prayer for him. Even more often, I hear our men and women in uniform talk about the strength they receive from prayers offered on their behalf.

That is why many Members of Congress were surprised when the Air Force and Navy issued regulations perceived by many to stifle the ability of military chaplains to pray a prayer that may not be politically correct. It was as if they viewed prayer as ceremonial salutation rather than communication with an almighty God.

In this year's House Defense Authorization bill, language was inserted that would reverse this trend, making certain the prayers of our military chaplains were not edited, protecting their ability to pray according to the dictates of their own conscience. Unfortunately, the Senate conferees on this bill are fighting the House position.

As the founder of the Congressional Prayer Caucus, I am joining with a small but growing group of lawmakers in Washington dedicated to drawing a line in the sand on matters of prayer and the protection of prayer. We believe that a battlefield is no place for political correctness and that restricting the ability of military chaplains to pray according to their conscience is a fundamental

violation of free speech and the free exercise of religion. We are willing to fight to defend these rights because we understand that entwined in our nation's spiritual heritage is a hopeful future.

While some people cite the absence of religious language in the Constitution as evidence of a secular country, nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, the concept of separation of church and state was not created to establish freedom from religion but to establish freedom for religion. It was established to protect the people from their government, not the people from their religion. And in keeping with the tenets our nation was founded upon, this concept of separation of church and state has been spectacularly successful.

But today, marching under a banner inappropriately labeled tolerance, some want to alter America's heritage and remove religion from its history, and more importantly, from its future. Their desire is not to safeguard the neutrality of the state. It is to eradicate every vestige of religion from public discourse. What they so stunningly fail to understand is that real tolerance is seen in our ability to accept difference, not uniformity.

America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves. It will be because we allowed faith to be stripped from our prayers and in doing so we allowed purpose to be stripped from our lives. Today let us reaffirm America's spiritual heritage and reaffirm the ability of all Americans to pray for blessings on their lives and on our nation according to the dictates of their conscience.